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### III

#### ABRAHAM B. NATHAN (ABŪ ISḤĀḲ IBRAHĪM B. 'AṬA), NAGID OF ḲAIROWĀN

It is only in recent years that the existence of Negidim in Ḳairowān in the first half of the eleventh century has been established.<sup>1</sup> Following the Egyptian example, the Jewry of North Africa had an officially recognized communal leader who went by the title of Nagid. At the Court and in Arab society in general this dignitary was known as Raīs al Yahūd. Whereas the first Egyptian Nagid, Paṭiel, as well as his son and successor, Samuel, had political authority over the Jewries in the whole of the Fāṭimid realm, then comprising Egypt, Syria, North Africa, and even Sicily, later events brought about a division of the office of Nagid. In the course of the first half of the eleventh century the sway of the Fāṭimid Caliphs, residing in Cairo, over North Africa gradually became weakened. The rulers of the Sanhāja Berbers, seated at Mahdiya (near Ḳairowān), had more or less a free hand even while still nominally acknowledging the suzerainty of the Caliphs of Egypt (till about 1044). But then Mo'izz, the ruling governor, joined the orthodox Sunnites and accepted in 1046 a new investiture from the 'Abbasid Caliph of Bagdād. Mo'izz succeeded in maintaining his independence against the central government

<sup>1</sup> See Poznański, אנשי קירואן, pp. 4-5.

at Cairo, which henceforth had no authority farther west than Barka.<sup>2</sup> Under these circumstances the Jews in North Africa could count on no adequate intervention with the local authorities on the part of the Nagid residing in Cairo. They found it necessary to have a recognized political representative of their own at the court of the ruling governors at Ḳairowān or Mahdiya.

The first Nagid of Ḳairowān seems to have been Abraham b. 'Aṭa, who is greatly eulogized by Hai Gaon as well as by an anonymous North-African poet.<sup>3</sup> We have read above (p. 415) of the treatise on Prayer which the Sura Gaon Israel Hakkohen b. Samuel (b. Ḥofni) dedicated to him. Abraham's successor to the dignity was Jacob b. 'Amram whom we have found in office while Elḥanan b. Ḥushiel was head of the Bet-Dīn of Ḳairowān. Also the Gaon of Jerusalem, Solomon b. Yehuda, refers to the Nagid Jacob in one of his letters.<sup>4</sup>

We edit here another poem in honour of Abraham b. 'Aṭa (Bodl. 2877<sup>42</sup>). The superscription reads, 'And he (the poet) said (it) in praise of the Sheikh Abū Ishāḳ Ibrahīm b. 'Aṭa, may God prolong his duration'.<sup>5</sup> From recto, l. 9, we learn that the father of this celebrated person was called Nathan (בחיירי בנו נתן).<sup>6</sup> The author, a stranger in Ḳairowān, greatly commends our Nagid for his generosity, high qualities, and eminent services to the community. It cannot be ascertained whence the author hailed, whether

<sup>2</sup> See Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and in Palestine under the Fāṭimid Caliphs*, vol. I, 1920, pp. 252-3.

<sup>3</sup> See especially Davidson, *JQR.*, N. S., I, 231 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See *JQR.*, N. S., IX, 162-3, and my work, mentioned above, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Catalogue* עטא בן עטא is wrongly printed as קעטא.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. the poem printed by Davidson, *l. c.*, pp. 241 (l. 35) and 242 (l. 50) נבירי בנו נתן.

from the Orient or Spain. His composition is written in fluent and attractive language, and deserves publication as a leaf in the crown of laurels wound around the head of this prominent leader of the Kairōwān Jewry.

(recto)

וקאל ממטרחא ללשיך אבי אסחק  
 אברהים בן עטא אטאל אללה בקאה  
 7 אַרְבַּע גְּלוּתִי . בְּעֵנֵי וְדִלוּתִי . וְהִנְנִי אֵילוּתִי <sup>8</sup> . מְגִלָּה לְךָ רִיב [י] .  
 בּוֹחֵי עֲוֹבְנֵי <sup>9</sup> . וְכַפֹּת חֲשַׁבְנֵי . וְחֲטָאֵי סַבְבֵּי . וְדִוְיֵי <sup>10</sup> וּמְכֹאֹבֵי  
 [1] תְּמִיד בְּשׁוֹעֲתִי . לְךָ צוּר יִשׁוּעֲתִי . וְאַשְׁחָה בְּדַמְעֵתִי . לְעַרְסֵי וּמִשְׁכְּבֵי <sup>11</sup>  
 [2] מְרֹב עֲוֹנוֹתִי . וְעוֹצֵם וְדוֹנוֹתִי . מְרַבִּים יְגוֹנוֹתִי . בְּנַפְשִׁי וּבְלִבִּי  
 5 וּבִשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹכָהּ . וְכַפֹּת נִשְׁכַּחְתִּי . בְּעֵנֵי לְמִשְׁפַּחְתִּי . וְאַחִי <sup>12</sup> וּבֵית אָבִי  
 [3] לְלוֹי אֲשֶׁר נֹעַד . לְעַמּוֹ בְּעַת צַעַר <sup>13</sup> . וְסִינֵי מֵאֵד רַעַד . בְּעַמְדֵי בְּמַצְבֵי  
 [4] חֲקִים לְמוֹשִׁיעִים . בְּכֹל דּוֹר לְנוֹשְׁעִים . נְדִיבִים וְגַם שׁוֹעִים . מְפִינֵי לְמַעֲצְבֵי  
 [5] מֵהֶם נְשִׂיא דָּרוּ . נְסִיכוֹ וּבְבִירוֹ . מְאִירוֹ וּמְנִהִירוֹ . וּפּוֹרוֹ כְּמִשְׁבֵי  
 בְּחִירוֹ בְּנוֹ נָתַן . נְדִיב לֵב כְּמוֹ אֵיתָן <sup>14</sup> . מְהַדָּר כְּמוֹ חֲתָן . בְּחַדְרֵי וּמוֹשְׁבֵי .  
 10 [6] פְּנֵי חֲמָה <sup>15</sup> . וְלִבּוֹ לְבַב חֲכָמָה . וְנִבּוֹר בְּמִלְחָמָה . בְּאַרְיָה וְגַם לְבִיא

<sup>7</sup> Each strophe consists of four hemistichs, of which the first three have internal rhyme while the fourth one rhymes externally. The metre of each hemistich is — — — — — | — — — — — except the first one of the first two lines which is — — — — — .

<sup>8</sup> i. e. God, cp. Ps. 22. 20.

<sup>9</sup> For עֲוֹבְנֵי, to suit the special metre of this hemistich.

<sup>10</sup> The metre demands this vocalization. The noun is דְּוִי, דְּוִי in pausal form (cp. Ps. 41. 4), hence וְדִוְיֵי would be more correct.

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Ps. 6. 7.

<sup>12</sup> This word can also be vocalized in the plural, וְאַחֵי.

<sup>13</sup> 'At the time of (His) step', i. e. when He guided Israel from Egypt towards Sinai. The whole line is based on Ps. 68. 8–9.

<sup>14</sup> i. e. The Patriarch Abraham, his namesake, who is identified in the Agadah with אֵיתָן הָאֲזוּרְחִי (Ps. 89. 1, see Baba Batra 15 a).

<sup>15</sup> Just as Moses (cf. Sifré to Num. 27. 20, פְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה כַּפְּנֵי חֲמָה).

(verso)

מִיֶּשֶׁר מִסְלֹתָו. לְגַנֵּד קֶהֱלֹתוֹ. וּמִנְהִיג בְּחַמְלָתוֹ. קִטְנִי וְגַם שְׂבִי  
 וְהוּא שָׂר לְכָל שְׂרָי<sup>16</sup>. מַחֲזֹק יְרֵי מוֹרֵי<sup>17</sup>. וְחַרְבּוֹ עָלַי צָרִי. וְחֹמְקָה לְהַסְבִּיבִי  
 וְהוּא אוֹר שְׁנֵי עֵינָי. וְהוּא אָב לְכָל בְּנֵי. וּמִשְׁעָן לְנִשְׁעָנִי. וְתִקְרִי וּמַעֲבִי<sup>18</sup>  
 בְּנֹתֵי בְּהוֹד עֲלָה. בְּקִשׁוֹט עָרֵי כְּלָה. וְכִיסֵי הָלֵא מְלֵא. בְּכַסְפֵי וּבְהֶבִי  
 5 וְצֹה לְהַלְבִּישֵׁי. תִּכְלֹת וְגַם מְשִׁי. וְצִנִּיף עָלַי רֵאשִׁי. וְסוֹסִים לְמַרְבְּבִי  
 שְׂמוֹ טוֹב בְּאֹרְחֵי<sup>19</sup>. וְרִיחוֹ בְּמַרְקָחֵי. מִהַלְפֵי בְּמוֹרְחֵי. צְפוּנֵי וּמַעֲרָבִי  
 לְבָנִים וְגַם בְּנֹת. יְתוּמִים וְאַלְמָנוֹת. יְמִינוֹ בְּמִתְנוֹת. בְּמַטָּר לְהַרְבִּיבִי  
 וְהוּא אוֹר לְהַלְוִי. וְסֶהַר בְּמַחְשָׁבֵי. וְנִפְן לְסַבּוּבֵי. וּפְרִיז לְהַתְנַיִבִי  
 לְדַת אֵל בְּפֶה גָמֵד. וְחִקּוֹ מֵאֵד שְׂמֵד. מַעֲלָה כְּמוֹ תָמֵד. וְעֵנִי בְּאֹזוּבֵי<sup>20</sup>  
 10 וּמִשְׁתִּיק לְמַדְמִימֵי<sup>21</sup>. וּמַפְעִים לְמַפְעִימֵי. וְנִלְחַם בְּכָל קָמִי. לְבַדּוֹ וּבַקְרָבִי  
 אֲדוֹנֵי אֲבָא אֶסְחַק<sup>22</sup>. קָחָה שִׁיר בְּךָ הַיּוֹחֵק. קְרוּבִים וּמְפֹרָחֵק. יִרְצוּן [לְחַבִּיבִי]  
 הַדְרָתִיו כְּמוֹ טוֹרִים. בְּנוֹפֵךְ וְסַפִּירִים. יִמְשַׁח<sup>23</sup> לְכָל. . . . . [בִּי]  
 [וְרִים נְשִׂיא הַדּוֹר. יְהִי עוֹד לְדוֹר דּוֹר. יִהְיֶה עֵתִיד לְדוֹר<sup>24</sup>. . . . לְשׁוּב. . . . [בִּי]

<sup>16</sup> This corresponds to another title of the Nagid, ז"ר השרים, see my work, *l. c.*, p. 254.

<sup>17</sup> i. e. supports the scholars.

<sup>18</sup> Cp. the Mishnic מעזיבה, the pavement covering the ceiling (תקרה); here in the meaning of a cover, protection.

<sup>19</sup> i. e. Abraham, see note 14.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. Num. R. c. 19: מפני מה מצורע נטהר בגבוה שבגבוהים ובנמוך: לקה בצרעת כיון שבנמוכים בעין ארז ובאזוב ע"י שהגביה עצמו כארז לקה בצרעת כיון שהשפיל עצמו כאזוב נתרפא ע"י אזוב.

<sup>21</sup> 'Those that (want to) silence me', i. e. to destroy me (cp. Jer. 8. 14).

<sup>22</sup> = Abū Ishāk.

<sup>23</sup> Read ומשתיק.

<sup>24</sup> Here the metre is faulty. This text is evidently corrupt.